

# **A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE YORÙBÁ CONCEPTION OF A PERSON**

Esther Adekanye  
Magisteravhandling i filosofi  
Handledare: Martin Gustafsson  
Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi  
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### **Abstract**

Personhood is a concept that has both a descriptive and normative dimension. Different philosophical traditions see the notion of a person as a phenomenon composed of not just a physical part, but also that of a non-bodily extension. While Descartes sees the human personality from a dualist position of mind and body, the Yorùbá, as well as most African traditions, understand the human personality as consisting of three parts or aspects: the material, the non-material and the quasi-material. An age-long belief in the history of human personality in an African thought system is the idea that personhood is attained at the fulfilment of communal norms and our collectiveness. These descriptions of African culture make clear its communitarian nature – a belief that holds that the community defines an individual. This paper challenges this claim as incomplete and as lacking a modern normative account of who a person is. Thereby, it makes a case for the inclusion of some existential phenomena that define a person in the Yorùbá thought system. This work will examine and compare the concept from the contribution of René Descartes and a Yorùbá-African conception. Attention is paid to the collective, that is, the communal concern of the idea of a person in an African thought system. Through this comparative and analytic method, this paper will recommend that beyond the tripartite conception of a person in the Yorùbá thought system, detailed attention needs to be paid to the existential function of human body parts.

**Keywords: Personhood, Yorùbá thought system, Dualism, Tripartite, Normative, Human Destiny.**

## Introduction

Our primary concern in this study is to present and examine the African (Yorùbá) concept of a person. For a very long time, discussions about personhood dominated scholarship, which is evident in history, religion and, especially, philosophy, while the concept is more evident in metaphysics than other branches of philosophy. The question that often comes to mind on the topic of personhood is whether the human person is physical, spiritual, or quasi-material<sup>1</sup>. Various thinkers have adopted irreconcilable viewpoints in articulating this concept. Different schools of thought claim to represent the notion of a person. Within these schools of thought, there is no absolute agreement on what constitutes a person (Bernard, 2011, p.23). Olatunji Oyeshile (2002, p.104) argues that “The African concept of a person goes beyond the mind-body dualism because it provides not only a satisfactory origin of man, it also pays sufficient attention to the relationship between the mental and physical aspects of man with his moral and social status.” This point is central to issues in the epistemology and metaphysics of the human being<sup>2</sup>. By epistemology, it is meant the epistemic ground upon which the human being is comprehended; human beings stand in relation to one another. Metaphysics is concerned with the nature of being, existence, the true nature of things, their ultimate essence and the reason for being, ultimate nature of reality among others.

This paper constitutes a significant departure from this tradition of philosophy cast in the mode of the West versus others. While reference is made to the Western philosophy of Rene Descartes where it is intellectually fruitful and necessary to do so, the focus of this study is on the African (Yorùbá) philosophy as it relates to the concept of person. In this sense, the paper attempts to fill the obvious gap of cross-cultural understanding presently evident between other philosophies besides Western philosophy. It critically examines the idea of a person in its metaphysical and normative groundwork, using the traditional African thought (African communalism) as its discursive paradigms. The paper emphasises the fact that while the question about the nature of a person is universally a fundamental question, its description and interpretation differ from one philosopher to another and from one culture to another. Like a cross-examination, the paper focuses on Western vis-a-vis African (Yorùbá) varied conceptions, descriptions, and interpretations of the fundamental issue of a person in existential

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<sup>1</sup> Quasi-material, as used in this work, is meant to explain the African concept of disembodied existence. When an individual dies, the soul leaves the body and continues its existence, without the former body. The presence of the spirit can be felt when evoked as if he has a new body but not bound by spacial laws.

<sup>2</sup> This idea shows the rationality behind why we distinguished between foetus, babies, humans and person. This epistemic ground underlies the nature of human existence.

philosophising. The aim, in the final analysis, is to provide and establish a new premise considering available materials in understanding and appreciating what it means to be a person in African (Yorùbá) context. While there is obvious discrepancy in their (Western and African) account, this study argues that they are heterologous in their analysis and concludes that normative elements (human dignity or virtues) are crucial defining elements of a person. In other words, a person lacking in moral worth and integrity is less than a person. He is, at best, not better than a beast (Igbafen 2014, p.124). The paper consists of five sections;

Chapter One discusses the Yorùbá people and their philosophy.

Chapter Two investigates the general idea of person. In doing this, emphasis will be laid more on the conceptions of person in African philosophy in order to engender a general African sense of what it means to be called a 'person'.

Chapter three highlights some areas of divergence(s) between the Western view of person (René Descartes as a foil of discussion) and that of the Yorùbá for possible comparison. However, the focus of this paper is not to compare the Western and the traditional Yorùbá concept of person, but to illuminate the latter.

Chapter four gives a new approach on the Yorùbá conception of a person.

Chapter 5 concludes the paper.

### **1. A Note on African (Yorùbá) Philosophy.**

The account of the Yorùbá people as to their origin is difficult to trace. This is because there are many oral traditions narrated to establish this. One of the popular oral traditions is the fact that the Yorùbá people led by Oduduwa settled in Ile-Ife thousands of years ago. At the new abode, they organised and networked themselves in related groups. This was due to their tendency to categorise themselves into large groups and develop Empires. The Yorùbá people, whose population were more than 30 million on the African continent and many millions in their diaspora, inhabits a world of myths, allegories, poetry, and the love and wisdom of the *Ifá* knowledge system (Ogunyemi 2015). Those are just a few of the components of the Yorùbá culture, the genesis of which is the holy city of Ile-Ife, Nigeria. They serve to remind the Yorùbá of a past that has survived through oral tradition. Yorùbá philosophy began with the publication of the cognisance of the earth, religion, oral traditions, and literature, all of which

include ancient truths and divine moralities with a reason (Ogunyemi 2015). Prominent Yorùbá scholars, among them Samuel Johnson, Wande Abimbola, Sophie Oluwole, Stephen Adebajji Akintoye, Abiola Irele, Kola Abimbola, Toyin Falola and Jacob Olupona, have analysed the idea that the ancient hero and deity, Oduduwa, is the acclaimed founder of the Yorùbá race. He (Oduduwa) was said to have been the bringer of light to the Yorùbá people, and the pioneer of the Yorùbá philosophy. This discussion is continuous; it is vital to understanding Yorùbá philosophy (Ogungbemi 2013).

In trying to interpret what the word Yoruba means, there have been different attempts. One such is J. D. Y. Peel's analysis. He argues that Yorùbá is a Hausa name of Arabic origin, originally applied only to the Oyo, adopted by the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society in the 1840s as the name for the people they proposed to evangelise. They extended it over succeeding decades to many other cognate people (the Egba, Ijesha, Ijebu, etc.).

Another scholar who has tried to explain the meaning of Yorùbá is C. L. Adeoye. He interprets Yorùbá to mean, at least, three things (Adeoye, 1989). One is that Yorùbá could mean the geographical location. Secondly, it could mean the language, and thirdly, it could also mean the people (Adeoye, 1989, p. 3). One fact that is not debatable is that the three are connected. In other words, Adeoye seems not to have completely solved the puzzle.

There were many close resemblances of language and culture between the Yorùbá, as well as traditions of common descent from Ile-Ife. These resemblances explain why they were all grouped under a common name in diasporic situations. They stood against much more different cultural groups: The Nago in Brazil, Lucumi in Cuba, and Aku in Sierra Leone (Peel, 2016, p. 216). Other Yorùbá were found in places outside Southwestern Nigeria. The Yorùbá have a rich cultural heritage that has established much its identity without being negatively affected by its early contact with western culture.

However, it is widely believed that the Yorùbá have no philosophy despite their long distant existence even before philosophers began their philosophical postulations. From the oral culture of its distant past to its vibrant present and buoyed by its scholarly discourses, Yorùbá philosophy is best understood as a folk philosophy (Yemi 2015). It is a set of narratives and cultural practices that attempt to explain the causes and nature of things affecting the corporeal and the spiritual universe. The Yorùbá philosophy is the comprehensive philosophical doctrine of the Yorùbá people, on issues of logic, ethics, epistemology, or metaphysics. The ancient Yorùbá philosophers, the ones who tried to understand the world,

were not mere Lovers of Wisdom, they gave us the categories of philosophy, some of which are:

Ethics (*Iwa*) the philosophy of understanding right or wrong. The earliest Yorùbá people observed the universe from the early days. They believe one should respect the rights of others in all spheres of life and embrace the principle of higher unity. An example of a moral philosopher is *Oranyan (Oranmiyan)*, a direct descendant of Oduduwa. Oranmiyan would teach *iwa* and encourage his kinsmen to have good *iwa*. He (*Oranmiyan*) would even ask people to monitor the activities of his people to ensure that they were of good character and behaviour. Oral tradition narrated that he would emphasise good character because he believed that only an omoluabi could be allowed to live in a community. Somebody with bad character was not worthy of living among men. Such would destroy the community. *Ifá* is a system where ideas, knowledge and wisdom were recorded.

Logic (*Ifá*) is regarded as the oldest and longest-established Yorùbá philosophical system, inhabited in a world of poetry, very rich in proverbs. *Ifá* is the compendium of Ancient Yorùbá culture. The *Ifá* knowledge system answered philosophical questions about the universe, which is considered the traditional Yorùbá Spiritual Knowledge, promoting unity awareness and mutual interrelation of all things (Oguntayo, 2018). When we come to *Ifá*, it seems we are in another world. There are stories of gods that are repulsive, and that is because they belong to folklore and are real. The Yorùbá also first derived science from *Ifá*. For example, *Ifá* is useful for purposes of astronomical observation.

The Yorùbá metaphysics discuss spirituality in the universe and the purpose of the physical world. It focuses its attention on the quality of nature.

Epistemology (*ogbon ati oye*) is rich in aphorisms and proverbs (Ogunyemi 2015). It is also committed to a search for love and wisdom, which is evident in the first novel published in the Yorùbá language – D. O. Fagunwa's 'Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale'<sup>3</sup> (1938). In his novel, and many of his other literary works, Fagunwa blended fantastic fables with folk philosophy and religion, and it reflects the admixture of happy and unhappy imaginings he found within himself. Bolaji Idowu took a similar focus in *Olódùmaré: God in Yorùbá Belief*, a work of theology; his research was published in 1962. More than any book of, or about, the Yorùbá in the 20th century, Idowu's work succeeded in combining religion with philosophy and

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<sup>3</sup> *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1938) was the first full-length novel published in the Yoruba language and was translated the book into English in 1968 as *The Forest of a Thousand Demons*.

literature. It makes clear that any tradition that widens people's horizons is the beginning of philosophy. The work also underscores that Yorùbá philosophy is a folk philosophy that validates the Yorùbá people's virtues namely; love, morality, temperance, honesty, honour, bravery, justice, prudence, and fortitude.

Another documented work on the Yorùbá people written by Alfred Ellis (1984) fails to give an adequate picture of the Yorùbá concept of a person. Moreover, he mistook a Yorùbá proverb, which was usually taken as a joke – *Orisha bi ofun ko si, ojojumo ni gb'ebo*. This proverb says that there is no god like the throat, and it receives every day. According to Oshitelu (2010, p.216) Ellis recognition of certain eminence to the spiritual idea of a person misses the point because the proverb stresses the physical need of a man that he must eat regularly and every day to live or survive.

However, philosophy has its foot in the foundation of Yorùbá philosophy writ large African philosophy. Philosophy is an intellectual activity that takes place among men with rational minds, intending to provide solutions to issues that concern human existence. If, philosophising is human activity across different cultures and traditions, then, it follows that Africans are capable of rationality and philosophising by providing explanations for their worldviews. In the same way, the Yorùbá have the capacity for critical reflection on issues as they affect them and their universe. It is with this same capacity that the Yorùbá have been able to discuss extensively, the concept of a human person, which is the focus of this study.

The approach used in this work runs through the early debate concerning the reality of African (Yorùbá) Philosophy as upheld by both indigenous and external philosophers. Scholars have for many decades advocated an African identity. Those who embarked on this project had a great desire to regain the lost dignity of the African peoples and they were determined to prove to the world that African thought can compete positively with anyone else in any part of the world. The search for identity, equality, and recognition by Africans has triggered the African intellectuals to work very hard in order to bring out their natural talents as a way of contributing to the growth and progress of the entire continent (Anjov, 2012).

Barry Hallen did a great work in regaining African identity. He is of the view that "human societies anywhere in the world were not thought to have developed the capacity for the intellectual reflection definitive of this supposedly sophisticated discipline. Therefore, Africa's indigenous cultures were, in both principle and fact, disqualified from occupying a place in the philosophical arena" (Hallen, 2002, p.3).

This shows that everyone develops his informal philosophy before the advent of formal philosophical training. This is against Hegel's claims that Africans are incapable of rationality and, by implication, incapable of doing philosophy (Adegbindin, 2015, p.21). He didn't use the Hegelian tradition where he excluded Africans from the universal philosophy of History (Adegbindin, 2015, p.21); hence, the need for African philosophy.

African philosophy is borne out of the need to, show to the world, the contributions of African sages to philosophy. It is equally an attempt at redefining their thoughts in the light of traditional philosophical tools and methods. It is also an attempt to distinguish it from anthropology and mythology as found in religion. Nevertheless, mythology across different philosophical traditions is disconnected from professional philosophising. This is because they offer a different, and non-scientific, way of thinking. This is substantiated in the position of Amaechi Udefi's article on *Philosophy, Mythology and an African Cosmological System* (2012). Udefi maintains that

“There is a tendency by some scholars, especially those African professional philosophers who belong to the analytic school of African philosophy, to deny any relationship between philosophy, myth, and cosmology. Their denial was based on their characterisation of philosophy as a rational and critical inquiry, while they take myth and cosmology as belonging to the realm of stories, folktales, etc. created by so-called primitive or traditional society to satisfy some emotional and instinctual need. Hence, they conclude that the concepts are unrelated. However, there is a deeper relationship between them than its acknowledgments since myth and cosmology constitute the raw material for philosophy. The concepts offer a perspective for an interpretation of the world and the mysteries and phenomena of existence in general.” (Udefi, 2012, p.1) (Kazeem 2010, p.64)

## **2. Personhood and the Idea of a Human Being**

It is relevant to show that in the history of thought, different scholars have interpreted the idea of personhood and human being in different ways. Here, we will provide some examples of the ways the individual person has been conceived in the past. In Third Reich or Nazi society, an individual was considered as a being of no consequence, merely to be used to realize the goals of a racially tainted Movement called the Nazi Party (Agulanna, 2010, p.284).



Similarly, according to Agulanna (2010, Pp.284-285), “In the Stalin’s Soviet Socialist Republics, an individual was a mere passive ‘plaything’ meant to serve the interest of an abstruse idea called the Party. An individual’s driven and simply used to serve some abstract social goal or expectations (only to be discarded or cast off as a husk from a shell or as a mere peapod later). In both instances, the State eventually collapsed due to the denigration or disparaging of the worth of human beings.’’. In general, the achievement and greatness of the society are measured by the value it places on its citizens. Comparably, what this shows is that communal achievement is only possible in an environment where the human person is treated with honour and nobility (Ibid, 2010, p.285). Earlier, Protagoras made a point in the following statement:

Man is the measure of all things, of things that are they are, of things that are not that they are not. (Cooper 2014. Pp, 13-82)

Protagoras’ statement has been interpreted in different ways. In the account of Plato, the word ‘man’ that Protagoras uses refers to a person. Some other accounts maintain that Protagoras had thought that every judgment is necessarily subjective and that there is no objective vantage point from which we might see things as they are in themselves, unaffected by our perspectives (Ibid 2014, Pp.13-82). In any case, what is clear from his statement is that a man (no gender bias intended), either as an individual or as a human being that gives meaning to reality. In other words, the world is what it is because of the meaning that human beings have assigned to it (Agulanna 2010, Pp.284-285). Capturing the issue more briefly, Protagoras is understood to say that it is human beings who give meaning to reality. In fact, man’s reign over the rest of nature and the physical universe does not seem to be in doubt.

Francis Beckwith sees personhood as the status of being a person. Defining personhood is a controversial topic in philosophy and law and is closely tied with legal and political concepts of citizenship, equality, and liberty (Beckwith, 2018). The word personhood is gotten from the Latin term *persona*. It refers to someone possessing legal status within the Roman Empire (Clifford, 2018, p.43). The concept of legal personhood is still utilized today in the American law, for example, and it recognises the existence of incorporated businesses as such; whereas unborn human foetuses do not enjoy this legal status.

Quoting Pauline Houtondji (1983), the concept of a person is a collection of views about what constitutes a human being. This means what makes a human being who he is, why he behaves the way he does, and what gives him the right to be called a human, as different from other

being. The concept of a person cannot be understood in isolation but conceived in a holistic way. This explains why the human person is a microcosm of the kind of society in which he belongs, a society entirely of his making. This is an indication that the notion of personhood and other issues of existence are determined by the orientation and the cultural, social, religious background that underpin individual worldviews. In the Western philosophical paradigm, one might say that there are two main strands when it comes to conceptions of what constitutes a person. A monist and a dualist strand. The monist strand sees a man as a homogeneous entity. Man is either material, or immaterial. Therefore, monism is sub-divided into two: the materialist monism and the idealist monism. In the view of Olúkáyòdé R. Adésuyi, “monism accounts for an element and neglects the other” (Adésuyi, 2015: 176). In contrast, the dualist sees a person as a composite of two distinct and clear but dependent entities. Typically, the idea is that a human person is made up of both material and non-material entities. The material is tangible, physical, corporeal, spatio-temporal while the non-material is not corporeal, non-physical and intangible element. These orientations underscore the philosophies of different Western scholars such as Leibniz, Spinoza, Aristotle, Plato, Kant, Descartes, among others.

According to what Placide Tempels, in his *Bantu Philosophy* (1959), understood as “a recreation of a traditional African metaphysics”, there has been an increasingly barrage of works and writings devoted to analysis of what a person is in the African traditional thought (Igbafen 2014, p.124). There is one general idea or belief on the concept of person in Africa. The reason is that from the whole range of diverse conceptions of person, it is argued that a person is both a normative and metaphysical being in the African context. To speak about the normative aspect is to argue that being a person in the African world is beyond a descriptive aspect in reference to certain biological constituents. This means that in Africa, a person is not defined or discussed by referring to the natural sciences, but to traditional and everyday opinions as they can be found in oral traditional and ordinary language, especially in proverbs (Kimmerle 2008, p.508) (Igbafen 2014, p.125). in the same vein, Igbafen (2014) argues that Ifeanyi Menkiti (2006) discuss the approach to personhood in African traditional thought in his book *On the Normative Conception of a Person*. As a maximal, or more exacting, approach, insofar as it reaches for something beyond such minimalist requirements as the presence of consciousness, memory, will, soul, rationality, or mental function (Igbafen 2014, p.125). This point is well understood in Tempels’ (1959) concept of Muntu. Muntu means the human person. Tempels maintains that the question of being a person within the African traditional framework stretches beyond the raw capacities of an isolated individual and the simple

reference to an individual considered as crude existents (Tempels 1959). More so, a person in the African context is both a normative and metaphysical being.

The normative approach to personhood disagrees with the assumption that an individual may be qualified biologically in terms of having a body, consciousness, reproducing, will, rationality, mental functions and so on, yet not considering a person in atypical African setting. Foreseeably, it is not weird to hear Africans describe someone who is biologically qualified to be a person as not a person or not a human being. For instance, among the Edo speaking people of South Western Nigeria (Owan), an individual may be considered as a person if his actions and behaviours conform with the values and norms of the community. Also, he may be referred to as “not a person” if his conduct is considered repulsive and at variance with the values and norms of the family, the clan and the community. In the Owan dialect or lexicon it is said ‘*omo kor*’ or ‘*oiwor-omon*, meaning “he is not a child.” To pass such moral judgment does not suggest that the child is suffering from some psycho-physical disability, rather it is that he is suffering from some moral amnesia (Igbafen 2014, 126). By this, it means that he has acted or behaved contrary to acceptable norms and values. Such shortcoming or misdemeanour may include disrespect for the elderly, refusing to perform domestic assignments such as the washing of plates, cooking, sweeping and cleaning of the house, it could also be that he refuses to participate in communal duties (Ibid 2014, 126). It could also include, in some cases, refusal to marry in time. The elderly ones are also expected to live up to the expectation of the family, the clan and the community, failing which they may be disregarded as a person. (ibid 2014, p.126)

In the same vein, the level of conformity to one’s communal norms and values is pivotal to one’s essence as a person and actualizing personhood is bound by one’s ability to use communal norms to guide one’s actions. It is for this reason that a person in Africa is defined in relation to his community. This point of view is less contested among scholars and philosophers of African studies. John Mbiti, Kwasi Wiredu, Segun Gbadegesin, and several others agree that community constitutes what defines a person in Africa.

According to John Mbiti (1969, p.108) an individual owes his existence to other people. He is simply part of the whole. Whatever happens to an individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to an individual. An individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am. It is in this sense we can say the Africa concept of person is referred to as collectivist philosophy or African communalism in

African scholarship. Communalism in this sense refers to the idea that community values take precedence over individual values to the extent that the welfare of the individual must be seen from the standpoint of the welfare of the community since the individual cannot exist without the community (Igbafen 2014, 127).

The metaphysical account of personhood considers an individual to be a person based on his metaphysical structure. Among the Akan people of Ghana, a person is a composite of three primary elements, namely, *nipuda* (body), *okra* (life-giving entity), and *sunsum* (that which gives a person's personality) (Appiah 2004, p.28). Similarly, among the Etsako a person is called *Oya*. A person or *oya* is said to be a combination of body and soul. The body is called *egbe*, comprising *uso* (head), *oregbe* (trunk), *abo* (hands), *aghwu* (stomach) and *awe* (legs). (Onimhawo 2000, p.86).

There are other several metaphysical accounts of person in Africa. This paper does not claim to describe all the theories. More so, there is the unresolved question about whether Africa's conception of person is of a dual or tripartite character. Even the relationship between soul and body is not clearly defined. For instance, what can we say is the clear relationship between mind and body, having agreed that person exists in two different constituent entities? Lienhardt (1985, p.148) argues that in Dinka traditional thought, the breath/life comes from, and in some way returns to, God, but otherwise little resembles the 'soul', understood as a ghostly counterpart of the living person. The 'ghost' in the machine' as Gilbert Ryle called it in his 1949 work *The Concept of Mind as a criticism of René Descartes*, is something which atheists as well as theists could imagine to be morally good or bad, and doctrinally consigned to heaven or hell. What Lienhardt is saying, in other words, is that a person has a body which is animated by breath/life, but that body and breath are not in apposition as 'body and soul' are in English. Is contradiction not implied here? What is the clear-cut connection and relation between these two entities? Granted that the soul, breath, life or whatever it is called has its distinct ontological status, what is its status in relation to the body? Is the soul diametrically opposed to the body or they are different but in unison? (Igbafen 2014, p.134)

In conclusion, a person in Africa is both a metaphysical and normative being. Importantly, one cannot be called a person if he loses his or her metaphysical essence. Neither can he be regarded as a person if he fails in normative and communal obligations. As we have seen, a person's relation with the society is crucial in defining who s/he is and what he or she is, given

the belief held in agreement, that Africans do not think of themselves as discrete individuals but rather understand themselves as part of a community.

### **3. René Descartes and the Idea of a Person**

René Descartes is often credited with the discovery of a mystery that haunts philosophers to this day. Descartes was a dualist of the metaphysical school of thought as well as a rationalist, for which reason primacy is given to the mind as well as reasoning respectively. He began his theory of mind and body in his metaphysical work titled *Meditations* (Descartes 1998). This idea of the mind-body theory sets the ground for the definition of who a person is.

In his *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1998), Descartes attempts to arrive at a basic set of principles that one can know without any doubt. To achieve this, he employs a method called methodological doubt, also sometimes referred to as methodological scepticism. He rejects any ideas that can be doubted and then re-establishes them to acquire a firm foundation for genuine knowledge (Rebecca 2019). Descartes doubts the senses, the physical world, and mathematical operation, but he cannot doubt that he exists. His argument is straight forward. If there is thinking and doubting, there is some substance doing the thinking and doubting and that substance is himself. There might be an evil genius who is deceiving him to think that there was a physical world when there was none. It cannot be the case that there is a physical world if he was not there to be deceived. Obviously, while he is thinking, he is aware he exists and that cannot be doubted. This is the foundation for his methodic doubt, since it is fundamental, and it is most likely to turn out to be certain and undoubtable. In fact, Descartes is offering a reconstruction of what is obvious, all that he is drawing attention to is that for as long as one is thinking, one exists as a thinker – ‘I think, I am’. He believes that one must exist in order to think and that a reflection on this provides him with a sample of incontrovertible truth he seeks – that he exists as a thinking substance. (Donkoh, 2017. p.70)

The thinking substance is the one that doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, and denies, wills, refuses, imagines and feels. According to Descartes, thoughts include everything we term consciousness. It is entirely different from physical objects and it is not part of nature. Instead, it occupies an independent territory and can exist without the body (Nellickappilly, 2018). Arising from this Descartes’ position, the above features must be present before we can start to talk about whether a human being can be regarded as a person or not. We may then need to ask, whether an insane person can be considered as a person in the real sense since the

insane engage in some forms of thinking that guide his decision on certain things that are of benefit to his health and safety? Hardly, will we see an insane person who will throw himself into a fire or under a moving vehicle.

Nevertheless, mind and body are intimately related; the body causally affects the mind, so also the mind causally affects the body. Mind and body look very different, but there seems to be a mutual influence (Greeks, 2006, p.5). It is for this reason that Descartes can assert that they are the constituents of the human being, and they make the person what he is (Adekoya, 2010, p.8). To Descartes, the mind is a substance distinct from the body. This distinction has come to be known as Cartesian dualism. Each substance, wrote Descartes, in principle “has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence and to which all other properties are referred. This extension in length and depth constitutes the nature of the corporeal substance and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance” (John, 1993, p.53).

There are different reactions to the mind-body problem created by Descartes, especially as to the immateriality of the mind. John Locke is among the many thinkers who reacted to Cartesian dualism. He rejects Descartes’ evidence for the immaterial nature of the entity that is thinking within us (Kenny, 2004).

#### **A. Eniyan in Yorùbá Thought System: A Metaphysical and Normative Account**

The Yorùbá of Western Nigeria, which this research is concerned with, is fully aware of the normative characteristics that form the human person. However, Segun Gbadegesin, has argued that the bodily part is part of what makes up of the human person. (Gbadegesin, 1984, p. 179). Ara (body), emi (soul) ori (head) and okan (heart) are essential characteristics of the human person. These physical characteristics also have spiritual dimensions. This analysis is just the descriptive part of the human person and not the normative. We shall enter the discussion shortly.

The question- “Who am I?” can be treated as an empirical question which may yield an answer based upon a description of observable human behaviour. However, the question- “Who am I?” is explicitly a metaphysical question inquiring into the constitutive elements of a human being. The Yorùbá of West Africa argues that there is a metaphysical account of what a human being consists of. This account is metaphysical because it proceeds from the nonphysical realm

of the Yorùbá gods, accompanied by their story of the creation of man and what he is said to consist of Yorùbá mythological accounts.

Descriptively, based on the historical account, it may now be seen generally that the Yorùbá claim that a person comprises both physical and non-physical elements. The latter are *emi* (soul) and *ori* (metaphysical head), while the former is *ara*. *Ara* consists of both the internal and external constituents which are *oju* (eyes), *etí* (ears), *ẹran ara* (skin), *ọkan* (heart) *ọpọlọ* (brain), *eje* (blood), *ifun* (intestine), *ese* (leg)<sup>4</sup> and so on. They are collectively referred to as *eya ara* (parts of the body). The Yorùbá maintain that the *ara* (body) and *emi* (soul) were created separately.

The *ara* is the first creation of the human person; it is a creation of Orisanla<sup>5</sup> (the Yorùbá God of creation) appointed by Olódùmaré (God of Heaven) with the responsibility of moulding human beings out of earth. This is borne out by the fact that Olódùmaré who is responsible for the creation of *emi* (soul) effected its work after Orisanla had moulded all the physical elements including the human heart (*okan*) out of the earth (Abimbola, 1970, pp 73-89). These bodies were moulded in different shapes, in terms of the deformities, beauty and ugliness (Makinde, 1984, p.196). In order of primacy, the body came before the soul. The *ara* (body) is defined in physical terms like strong, big, heavy, weak, light, hot, and so on. (Gbadegesin, 1991, p.28) The moulding of *ara* (body) as stressed by Akin Makinde in his paper *An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example* (1984) took place in the fifth heaven (Orun Akaso).

In the same vein, Makinde argues that from oral evidence obtained during his research from an Ifá priest, Chief Awotunji Awoyefa, the creation of the physical element of a person by Orisanla does not include hands and legs (Makinde 1984, p.190). It was the duty of Ogun (the god of war and hunting) to cut the hands into fingers and the legs out of the shapeless trunk (Makinde, 1984, p.190). One important question arising from this is that who is to be taken as the moulder? In some way, are we to agree that Orisanla or the joint effort of Orisanla and Ogun takes the responsibility of moulding the *ara*? However, the different positions presented by the same scholar gave rise to this research of getting to know more about the concept of a person in the Yorùbá thought, though, the creation of the physical element takes place in the spiritual world called (Isanlu Orun). Therefore, Orisanla is eulogised thus:

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<sup>4</sup> See Abimbola 1970:80, *ese* introduces the principle of individual effort, movement and strife. *Ese* is a vital part of a person both in the physical and spiritual reign. I will reflect more in this paper

<sup>5</sup> The name Orisanla, which means great divinity, is also known as Obatala derived from the words: OBA TI O NI ALA, meaning the King in the white apparel, the king that brought humans into being

*Alagbede Orun,*

*Oko abuke,*

*Oko Arara bori pete.*

The spiritual Blacksmith, Husband

of the Hunchback, Husband dwarf

with a big flat head. (Adegboyega,

1998, p.44)

In the same vein, the Yorùbá address the concept of ara (body) not as a physical element but the whole material constituents of a person. When a Yorùbá man or woman asks another person “se ara le” (is the body strong?) they are concerned with the general state of one’s health, not simply with the physical state of the body (Oladipo, 1992, p.15). For instance, when I say o dabi pe ara re fa (it seems as if you are not alright), I might not be referring to the physical body, but this time to some other parts, which are internal. Although ara (body) is a combined word for all the material components of a person, the Yorùbá identify some of these features as fundamental to the existence of a person. They include ọpọlọ (brain), ọkan (heart) ifun (intestine), etc. However, for the purpose of this paper, efforts will be made only to discuss the second – ọkan (heart)

The Yorùbá uphold that ara (body) is created from the earth which is a perishable entity. The body is thus capable of decaying as a feature of the earth, and likewise ara is perishable. The concept of ara as a material entity does not do justice to its conception as the totality of the physical organs. Perhaps, because of this, different human beings have different bodily structures. Illness and health are functions of bodily structure and this is an important concern in the traditional findings of illness and counselling. Babalawo (traditional healers)<sup>6</sup> take the physio-chemical structure of the human body into consideration before any form of therapy or healing is administered.

This is defensible by the view that the internal organs of the body are regarded as playing a role in the proper functioning of the person. For Instance, the heart (okan) is responsible for pumping and circulating blood in the body. Likewise, opolo (brain) plays a role in controlling the mental activities of a person. Opolo (brain) is recognised as the essence of logical reasoning

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<sup>6</sup> Babalawo literally means 'father of the mysteries' in the Yorùbá language. It is a spiritual title that denotes a priest of the oracle.



and ratiocinate activities. A mentally disabled person is one whose opolo (brain) is not complete while an insane person is one whose opolo has been disrupted. Thus, opolo (brain) is a material entity located in the head. Whenever traditional psychiatrists identify a disruption in the opolo (brain) as the cause of mental illness, it does not rule out their findings for extra-natural reasons for such diseases. If after a period of medication based on the cause, the patient does not improve (Gbadegesin, 1998, p.150). Before we go further into the discussion, let us get a quick understanding of what okan is, okan, to the Yorùbá, is the seat of emotion. It is linked to human existence. Figuratively, it can be understood as the human heart. Okan is an entity connected with the blood. It is responsible for the pumping of blood and necessary to the transport system in the body (Adésuyi, 2015, p.178).

Okan is acknowledged as the physical organ responsible for the circulation of blood (Gbadegesin, 1998, p.150). Besides its circulatory function, which is physical, it has another function, which is psychological, other than intellectual functions. Whenever a man faces difficulties, the Yorùbá expects such a person to be courageous. They would say ‘se okan re giri’ (build up your psyche-ego). If a man has lost some parts of his fortune, and he is in total resignation, Yorùbá advise ‘mase ba okan je’ (do not be disheartened) (Adésuyi 2015, p.178). In some cases, the okan is associated with virtue. Yorùbá will say of a courageous man, ‘okunrin naa ni okan’ (the man has a strong heart). However, okan is mentioned in the immaterial sense, in reference to psyche or virtue. The meaning of okan can be used denotatively as the seat of human intellect. Consequently, it is used in agreement with intelligence, thought, and action. At this point, the word iye (memory) comes in. This, however, has differing interpretations English language. Thus, only a person has iye. Why? Because only a thinking being has the capacity to memorise and understand himself, others and his environment. Before information processing starts with input from the ara (body), the sensory information is transformed into opolo (brain), but it must go through okan for the purpose of memory (Ibid 2015, p.178). Now the issue of iye comes alive. We should note that iye is not the same as okan. Although okan is instrumental to memory, it is, however, not memory. Nevertheless, okan performs a function when it comes to memory. The argument pushed forward is, what is iye comparable with? Is it thought or mind? It could be rationality but what is the importance of mind (okan is sometimes, referred to as the mind). The Yorùbá says ‘okan mi ko si m bi’ (my mind is not here), Does this presuppose that there is a place of storage in the okan? When biased, the memory is also tampered with. When a person is angry, he is said to forget what he has in heart (Adésuyi 2015, p.178). okan is an important phenomenon that

has some relationship with memory when a person has 'ibale okan' (rest of mind) or 'oye a tete ye' (if he understands quickly and easily) (Ibid, p.178). Is it in all cases that when there is ibale okan (rest of mind), one remembers very fast? ibale okan is psyche.

The next creation of the human person begins when Orisanla undertaking ends. This phase marks the beginning of the non-physical concept of a person. Olódùmaré comes on board to perform his part, which requires activating the lifeless body shaped by the Orisanla by breathing emi (soul) into lifeless body. The emi is the life force from an immortal king (Oba Aiku) and it is the spiritual aspect of a person. Makinde (1983, p.40) argues that Immortality means Aiku and the emi (soul) is immortal. The creator of emi is Olódùmaré (God). As a result, emi (soul) is immortal, his breath into the lifeless body makes the body a living soul. It is the breath of this eternal king in the human body that represents his image in man. Emi (soul) is consequently part of the 'divine breath' which Olódùmaré puts into every person to make him a being. The emi is personal, and in communion with, and inseparable from, the universal emi (Olódùmaré)

The importance of emi in the Yorùbá concept of a person cannot be relegated because without emi we cannot talk of a person. The conception of a person is not complete without discussing emi. There is a saying among the Yorùbá '*omode yii lo sinmi edo, sagbeje mowo, emi o laa ro* (this little ones' stride gently, the soul has no duplicate)' (Abimbola, 1970, p. 78). This view is stressed further by an Ifá corpus, which describes emi as possession of man and his connection to Olódùmaré. The corpus says thus,

*Gbogbo ori afin ewu*

*Abuke lo rere oosa ma so*

*Lati owo lagbaja loti gba awon nnkan wonyi*

*A dia fun Orunmila*

*Nigbati on' lo ra emi*

*Omo Olodumare ni iyawo*

*Emi omo Olodumare*

*Iran awon ti o n joko sori eni*

*Ti o n fi ori kodoro gbeji*

*Won ni Orunmila rubo*

*O rubo*

*Wom ni ki o rubo fun esu*

*O see*

*Ebo re ru*

*Awon irunmole te'wo gba ebo re*

*O ni nko mo pe bi emi ko ba bo*

*Ireti ati laya n be*

*Ti emi ko ba bo*

*Ireti ati bimo n be*

*Ti emi ko b abo*

*Ireti ati lohun gbogbo n be*

*Ooto ni*

*Ireti ati lohun gbogbo laye n be*

*O o to ni.*

Albino's head is full of grey hairs

The hunchback carries the burden of Oosa without relief

He got those things from lagabja

Ifá divination performed for Orunmila

About to go and buy emi

Olódùmaré daughter of the lineage those who seat on a mat

In the dew with clean shaved heads

Orunmila was asked to perform a sacrifice

He did

He was told to give a sacrifice to Esu

He gave it  
Divinities immediately accepted his sacrifices  
He said I did not realise that if emi does not fail  
There is hope of having money  
If emi does not fail  
There is hope of having wives  
That is right  
If emi does not fail  
There is hope of having all good things of life  
That is right. (Adegboyega 1998, p. 47)  
(Oladipupo 2013, 6-7)

As a living force, emi is said to have its physical manifestation in the blood stream (eje,) and the human heart (okan) plays an essential role in anatomy. (Ibid, p.47) Emi as the active element of life is an element common to all humans; it motivates the body by providing existence and guarantees consciousness if it remains in force.

As a confirmation of life, emi brings hope and makes desires realisable (Gbadegesin 1999, p.153). Emi has its physical realization in the human heart. When a man dies, his emi, the spiritual part, does not perish; instead, it goes to orun (heaven) where it enters a new era and takes its proper place among the ancestors (Abimbola, 1970, p.78). In the words of Makinde (1984, p.192), “the Yorùbá sees the body as a protector of the soul because the soul lives in the body as a person dwells in a house. But while a house remains a home, although there might be nobody living in it, the body without a soul is dead and destruction of the body is an automatic disappearance of the soul while the demise of the soul also means the collapse or death of the body.” The soul becomes a fugitive thing, and can never be caught in the collapse, destruction or death of the body. It, therefore, appears that the body cannot affect the soul in any way although the soul can affect the body by keeping it alive until the time of its destruction or mutilation, which comes into being in different ways, none of which can affect the soul. Perhaps, the most active belief from oral and written evidence is that emi is an imperishable element of a person precisely because it is the property of Olódùmaré and so must go back to

him after the death of a person (Makinde 1984, p.192). Hence, the soul, like its creator, never dies; therefore, we talk of dead bodies but never of dead souls. Undoubtedly, it is a contradiction to say that the soul, which, like its creator is immortal, dies. Rather it deserts its temporary earthly abode (the mortal body) and goes back to its creator, Olódùmaré (God) in heaven.

Furthermore, this accounts for the belief in the immortality of the soul in the Yorùbá thought. The interpretations of the nature of the soul (emi) contrasts with the body (ara), not only pointing to a conclusion (that we claim to know more about the soul) but also to the physical body. Because there's a general tendency to believe that the spiritual aspect (emi) of a person is more real than the physical aspect (ara). However, this position is subjected to philosophical dispute. The philosophical question that could be raised here is, if emi is immortal, then it is impossible for its physical manifestations to be in okan (heart) which is believed to perish with the body. The combination of okan (heart) and eje (blood) as the expressions of emi (soul) in the body is contradicting to the fact that at death, eje (blood) stops to flow and the okan (heart) is said to perish with the body. The best way to solve this problem is to see the emi (soul) a spiritual entity that survives without the support of the okan (heart) or eje (blood). Even though, the account on the creation of a person does not tell us that eje or okan is the manifestation of Olódùmaré. Another philosophical question that can be raised is how can emi (soul) an incorporeal element occupy space and have an independent existence. However, it might seem that the emi (soul) is a quasi-material. This makes the problem more controversial.

Ori is the last principle of the human person. Ori<sup>7</sup> (head) is called the “inner head” (Balogun, 2007, p.118) of a person, ori “is responsible for the actuality and worth of man in the material world. For the Yorùbá, ori is not only the bearer of destiny but also the essence of human personality, which rules, controls and guides the life and activities of a person.” Ori is the personal spirit of a person; it determines an individual destiny. Culturally, people are the creators or makers of their own destiny (Wiredu 2004, p.420). Ori orders the trajectory of a person's spiritual journey on earth. The ori is a guardian spirit providing care, guardianship, and providence. In this respect, the concept of ori is compared to the concept of a guardian

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<sup>7</sup> The Yorùbá word ori means head (as in the physical head of a human or an animal). However, giving adjustment to our discussion on the spiritual head or inner head which the Yorùbá calls ori-inu. In the paper, our contextual usage, meaning and understanding of ori throughout the paper would discuss as the spiritual head.

angel in Christianity, and the demon in ancient Greek religion. Adegboyega (1998, p.34) demonstrated that, ori is acquired or given to the individual by his choice. The accounts include:

Adamo - That which is affixed at creation,

Ayanmo – that which is affixed,

Akunlegba – that which one receives kneeling,

Akunleyan – that which one chooses by kneeling, and,

Akosile – that which was written at creation. (Adegboyega, 1998, p.34)

Similarly, Gbadegesin claims, “ori has a dual character. On the one hand, it refers to the physical head and given the acknowledged significance of the head vis-a-vis the rest of the body. On the other hand, it is the make-up of the human person and considered very vital even in its physical character” (Gbadegesin, 1999, p.36).

In the Yorùbá mythological account, the creation of ori (inner head) is credited to Ajala, the divinity in charge of moulding ori (head), although the ori might be symbolized with the physical head, it is not identical with it. Because, the Yorùbá interpret ori as the inner head. (Gbadegesin, 1998, p.156). Every person goes to Ajala’s house to receive their ori and the role of Ajala plays in the moulding of ori shows that some ori are good, why some are bad. In the words of Abimbola (1970, p.163), “Ajala is believed to be an incorrigible debtor, a drunkard and irresponsible creature.” In any case, Ajala finishes moulding heads; he puts them inside his storehouse. However, most of the heads are never carefully made, for he sometimes left some over burnt while some are badly shaped. On the contrary, as a debtor, he is responsible for moulding many bad heads and only some good ones. The act of selecting ori in the house of Ajala is regarded as one of free choice. Most of the heads moulded by Ajala are bad and useless. It follows that most individuals who go to Ajala's house to select might choose a bad and useless head. With the characters of Ajala, as explained above, we can conclude that there might be worse ori (inner head) than the good ones. The Yorùbá point out that the simple way to understand the provided evidence is to take good care of one’s head as an orisha, one’s ori is responsible for what becomes of a person. Whatever situation we find ourselves either good or bad is allowed by their ori.

Chinua Achebe also talks about the concept of ori in his book *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958). He writes, “clearly his god or chi<sup>8</sup> was not made for great things. A man could not rise

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<sup>8</sup> Chi (as known as Ori) is the personal spirit of a person in Igbo culture

beyond the destiny of his chi. The saying of the elders was not true-that if a man said yea his chi also affirmed. Here was a man whose chi said nay despite his affirmation” (Ibid1958: 43). The ori, therefore, carries a person’s existential manifesto. Whatever a person becomes is because of his ori. We should note that everyone is believed to have chosen their ori. Thus, the choice of a good one denotes success and good fortune and the person who has such an ori is called *olori rere* (one with a good head). The choice of a bad ori denotes bad fortune and failure. The person who retains such is called *olori buruku* (one with a bad or unfortunate head). We see a clear case of essentialism: essence precedes existence. The claim is that, “every person has his biography written before coming to the world” (Balogun, 2007, p.119).

However, ori is responsible for human destiny and it plays the same role, like that of the soul, as a metaphysical one. The choice of a good ori in heaven brings success, while that of a bad ori brings failure to its bearer on earth. But the Yorùbá also believe that ori can’t operate properly without the support of *ese* (leg) both in a physical and spiritual sense. As Wande Abimbola puts it:

It must be emphasized however, that the Yorùbá concept of the choice of destiny through ori also emphasizes the need for hard work to bring to fruition the potentiality for success represented by the choice of a good ori. This leads us to believe in *ese* (leg) as an important ingredient of human personality. *Ese* (leg) is regarded by the Yorùbá as a vital part of the human personality, both in a physical and spiritual sense. *Ese*, for the Yorùbá, is the symbol of power, strife and activity. It is therefore an element which enables a man to struggle and function adequately in life so that he may bring to realization whatever has been marked out for him by the choice of ori. Like ori, *ese* is regarded as an *orisha* which must be catered for in order to achieve success. Therefore, when a man makes sacrifices to his ori, part of the sacrifice is also offered to *ese* (Abimbola, 1970, p.85).

The significance of *ese* in relation to ori in the concept of person is a passage in Abimbola’s work which explains why *ese* (leg) is an important element. When all ori(head) gathered themselves together to deliberate on something they wanted to bring to fruition they did not invite *ese* (leg) to the meeting. After making all their deliberations, they discovered that there was nobody to carry them about. They were therefore forced to recognise the importance of *ese* in the execution of their plans (Abimbola, 1970, pp.85-86).

The idea presented in Abimbola’s work brings to our attention that even if one is predestined to succeed in life by the choice of a good ori, one cannot actually achieve success

without the use of one's *ese* (Abimbola, 1970, p. 86). It could be argued that if predestination is assumed, the indication is that, to be successful in life one has to make use of his *ese* (leg), for it is specifically the choice of success in life that the choice of a good *ori* implies. The question that might be raised is why the distress of not using one's *ese* if it has indeed been predestined through the choice of a good *ori* that one would succeed in life? Actually, *owo* (hand), *oju* (eye), *eti* (ear), *inu* (nose), *enu* (mouth) and *opolo* (brain) are equally useful to one's success in life as one's *ese*, why not consider these also as important elements, especially as *owo* (hand) does most of the work to be done by man on earth likewise the eye (*oju*) visualise how far a person goes in life. Does the effective functioning of both *ese* (leg) and *owo* (hands) depends on the centrally coordinating activity of the human brain (*opolo*)? The simplest answer to these questions may be found in the fact that the Yorùbá believe that *ori* is a mere potentiality. Even though it represents human destiny, it does not do so categorically. As a mere potentiality, it means that certain things must be done along with the choice of a good *ori* in order to bring such a hypothetically good choice into fulfilment.

Among the others would require the effective use of one's *ese* (leg), *oju* (eye), *owo* (hand), and *opolo* (brain) and in addition, sacrifice to one's *ori* whenever such sacrifice is deemed necessary. An element of freedom is involved in the making of sacrifice or propitiation to one's *ori* as a way of shaping one's destiny. From the above, one interesting point needs to be said. Apart from the Western conception of a person as body and soul, the presence of *ori* in the Yorùbá thought makes the conception of a person comprehensive and more complex than in the Western conception.

Furthermore, the Yorùbá concept of a person cannot be concluded without discussing the encounter between the *ori* carrying being with the Onibode (gatekeeper). The onibode will interrogate him through dialogue before entering the earth. The dialogue is based on his mission in the world, which he is about to enter. The summary of the dialogue as presented by Idowu (1962, p.183) centres on who the parents of the being will be, where they reside, their occupation, general background and the behaviour of the *ori* carrying being. The dialogue also contains what the individual hopes to achieve, whether he shall be married or not, rich or poor, live long or die young. To all of these, the Onibode will say ase *gun* (meaning, it is sealed). The personage would be instructed by Onibode to touch the tree of forgetfulness (*Igi-igbagbe*) sequel upon the final conferment of his destiny by the Supreme Being and, he shall become unconscious of his predestined lots. Thus, the gate to the earth shall be flung open for the new entrant who is unconscious of all that lies ahead (Gbadegesin, 1998, p.292).



If the Individual behaves according to the standard laid down by the community, they will relate with him or her as a person, but if the reverse is opposite, the community may decide not to relate with the child. This account explains the normative conception of a person in Yorùbá thought system. Hereafter, in the African (Yorùbá) societies it is the community that makes a person. Therefore, beyond the stages earlier discussed as constituting the creation of a person in Yorùbá tradition the communities also play vital roles (Oladipupo 2013, Pp.17-19). For without the bodily existence, the human person cannot be a subject of discussion, on which the demand of obligation is placed.

### **B. Segun Gbadegesin on Eniyan in Yorùbá Thought System**

According to Toyin Falola (1993, p.806), “Segun Gbadegesin explores many of the contents of African thought. These include ideas about God, the person, community, destiny, causation, and morality. Drawing on the Yorùbá of Nigeria, he explores four issues in four chapters: the concept of the person (eniyan), of the community, of religion, and health. The Yorùbá of West Africa has a rich culture that is grounded in communal principles. The Yorùbá conceptualize a person in the descriptively and Normativity view. Emphasis is placed on the normativity of the human person rather than the ordinary conception of a person, which is descriptive. The ordinary conception encapsulates the ara (body), which is the physio-material part of the human body that houses internal components such as ese (leg), ifun (intestine), opolo (brain), okan (heart), and ori (which presupposes both the outer head and the inner head). There is also the part of emi, (the spirit, active element of life that guarantees conscious existence) which is the most important and known as the divine breath of Olódùmaré (The Supreme Being)” (Kazeem and Adeogun, 2012, p.5). This latter on the divine breath of Olódùmaré is the link between Olódùmaré and the human person and it is metaphysical. It is the same divine breath that makes Gbadegesin argued that the life of a person could not be taken for reasons of utility, as some participants in the debate in bioethics have claimed. To him, human life is sacred, God-given and should not be a means but an end. (Gbadegesin, 1991, p.257)

In his analysis of the Yorùbá conception of a person, Gbadegesin considers the tripartite conception mentioned earlier. However, he adds something else vis-à-vis ara- (body), emi- the life-giving element, ori- the inner head and okan (heart). To him, ara is the physical- material part of man, whereas, okan is an element in the structure of the human person having a dual character. He does not just view okan as an internal organ of the body responsible for pumping

and circulating blood. He equally views it as an invincible part responsible for all forms of conscious identity. To Gbadegesin, *emi* and *ori* belong to the non-physical realm of the human constitution. He sees *emi* as the active principle of life, the life-giving entity that guarantees the conscious existence of a person for as long as it is in force. He considers the inner head, as the bearer of human destiny. The significance of *ori* as an element of the human person, Gbadegesin asserts that “*ori* is the determinant of the personality of the individual. The *emi* as the active life force supplied by the deity is a common denominator; it cannot be the basis for identifying a person as an individual self because it is common to all” (Gbadegesin 1998b, pp.149-168). Thus, Gbadegesin recognizes the role of *ori* as the determinant of human personality. The role of *ori* as the seat of personal identity could not be overemphasized.

The normative conception of a person in the Yorùbá thought as recorded by Gbadegesin is rooted and grounded in the communitarian principle of the people. Personhood is attained through the conferment of people we live together within the community. The place of moral rectitude, choice, and responsibility of the individual is sacrosanct in determining this. He argues that,

A person whose existence and personality are dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute his quota to the continued existence of the community, which nurtures him and partakes in his destiny. Being a person means that one has certain rights and responsibilities... including the obligation to be useful to the community and to be of good behaviour. The training needed has been provided from the beginning of life and it is expected that grow-up person will have internalised society's norm by adulthood. If for some reason, this expectation is not realised, efforts are made to make amend by every of further training, socialization, and rituals. Personhood is denied to an adult who, after all, still does not live up to expectation. She/ he is treated as a child, with sympathy but without responsibilities. (Gbadegesin, 1993, p.258) (Kazeem and Adeogun 2012, p.6)

With his communitarian concept of society, Gbadegesin is trying to make a connection between the notions of *ori* and - the sociological conception of a person. Personhood is a process of unification. The above shows that personhood is not conferred on an amoral agent, such as infants, insane beings, deformed and anyone suffering from *akrasia*. Let us assume, a person who has a hunchback or some other physical deformity. Reasonably, the physical deformity has nothing to do with the mental abilities of a person. Some deformities are accidental rather than predetermined except it is argued that all accidental deformities are predestined. This

supposedly shows that a person's predestined element is either deformed or healthy. Accomplishment in life does not depend on one being a fit person, just as failure does not always depend on one being a deformed person. However, the choice of a good ori might not lead to success without the use of one's owo or ese. We should not disregard deformed persons as incompetent of success. Here, the importance of opolo (brain) should not be overlooked, because, it is possible for a person to have chosen a good ori and yet fail in accomplishing good fortune when the use of one's hands and legs are not properly coordinated by one's brain (opolo).

In the same vein, a deformed person might succeed if he makes good use of his mental abilities. There is an empirical evidence showing that the Yorùbá approach to the deformed person is refutable, and hence it is heart-warming to note that modernity has refuted this aspect of the Yorùbá conception of the human person. There are many institutions for the physically challenged or deformed children nowadays. Besides, a choice of ori either good or bad, the mental abilities appear to be more important than the physical make-up in the actualization of a person. The Blind, lame or deaf people often turn out to be prominent in their societies. According to Ifeanyi Menkiti as quoted by Kwasi Wiredu, "personhood is something which has to be achieved and is not given because one is born of human seed. As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something which individuals could fail at or can be competent, or ineffective, better or worse" (Wiredu, 2009, p.16). The notion of eniyan in the Yorùbá thought system, just as in any culture gives ground for the understanding of bioethical discourses.

In what follows, we shall discuss the African notion of communalism. This ideology implies a certain understanding of what a person is. Meanwhile, let us point out the shortcomings of the idea of a person put forward by Gbadegesin. The communalistic approval of personhood in an African thought system does not present the society as a liberal one. This is because the Yorùbá community as presented by Gbadegesin does not recognise the idea of individuality rather, to them, rights reside in the community. To what extent is the choice and freedom of the individual guaranteed in such a communalistic society? However, these shortcomings do not nullify the existence of communalism in Africa, not at least in the traditional African society.

### C. Communalism and the Notion of Personhood in Yorùbá

Communalism is expressed in the sharing of common social life, commitment to the collective good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligations, caring for others, interdependence, and solidarity (Awoniyi 2015, p.8). Different scholars<sup>9</sup> have written on the idea of communalism in Africa with little or no variation to the practices in different African cultures.

Babacar (2007, p.807) “conceptualizes communalism as both an African conceptual framework and a set of cultural practices that prioritizes the role and functions of a collective group over the individual in a worldwide context.” The important thing to think about is the role of the community in capturing how and where these practices are well expressed. Because the community enhances the growth and development of every individual. In other words, there is no nothing like people living individually, every individual’s life depends on the existence of the community. There is a saying in Yorùbá that goes “*oju merin lo n bimo, igba oju lo n wo*” This translates: “two parents give birth to a child, but members of the community raise it.” That is, when a couple gives birth, it is the responsibility of the community to see to the growth and development of the child, in terms of the moral development of the child and most times material provisions from the generous individuals. It would be a generalization to say every member of the community would be responsible for a child’s education materially. The community (by community we mean the people) watches the child grow to become the kind of person that fits into the lives of the community and become an individual who can represent the ethos of the community in the outside world. Therefore, the conception of personhood is dependent more on the communal approval in the Yorùbá belief system

J. A. Majasan (1969, p.41) agrees with the above position. He argues that “education is the process by which the community seeks to open its life to all the individual within it and enable them to take their part in it. The attempts to pass on to them its culture, including the standards by which they will live by. In fact, the culture is regarded as final, the attempt is made to impose the culture on the younger mind.” This form of education is usually passed across to the younger generations through folklores, proverbs, songs, dance, riddles, monumental history, and mythological narratives. Through this form of education becomes aware of the narratives

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<sup>9</sup> They include but are not limited to John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1969); Idowu, Segun Gbadegesin, “Eniyan: The Yoruba Concept of a Person” in P.H Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds), *The African Philosophy Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1998); Kwame Gyekye, “Akan Concept of a Person”, in Richard A. Wright (ed), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, (New York: University Press of America, 1984); Ifeanyi A Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Tradition Thought” in Richard Wright (ed), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, (New York: University Press of America, 1984); Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, “On the Normative Conception of a Person” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, (USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006); and Olusegun Oladipo, “Rethinking Yoruba World-View and the Ideals of Life” in Olusegun Oladipo (ed) *The Third Way in African Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu*, (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2002)

that led to their emergences, lessons, and sustainability of different events of the community. It is in learning that the individual becomes a person.

Majasan points out that “an ethnic group like the Yorùbá operating within the framework of national cohesion of one Nigeria, can, through its educational programs and activities, train its youth to respect its culture, accept the omoluabi, attitude to life and still operate comfortably with keen dynamism as citizens of a technological age” (Ibid: 41).

An omoluabi is a morally upright individual that keeps to the norms and customs, etiquette and common rules of the society. It is synonymous with ‘eniyan’ and often used interchangeably. Omoluabi shuns social vices and pursues the development of the community. He is an example of what the Yorùbá call eniyan - that is, a person. A non-person (in a moral sense) is regarded as *eniyan lasan*, a worthless human that does not have anything to offer the community. The death of such a person does not affect the community, as ‘eniyan lasan’ is not qualified to join his ancestors in the ancestral world.

Let me note that the word ‘eniyan’ in Yorùbá semantics is ambiguous. Firstly, eniyan could be used to distinguish between human from an animal in a narrative context, like saying eniyan ni, ki n se eranko, that is, he is human and not an animal. This usage is different from the normative use of the word eniyan to mean a person different from just a human being. Secondly, to qualify as eniyan, one must have fulfilled the criteria of personhood in the community. This is like the use of onipa in the Akan conception of a person, as pointed by Kwasi Wiredu in his paper titled *An Oral Philosophy of Personhood: Comments on Philosophy and Orality* (Wiredu, 2009, p.16).

Having discussed the normative aspect of a person, what would be the conception of personhood in a communalistic society and what was the experience like in the traditional Yorùbá communities? Preston N. Williams (1995, p.328) expresses his view that if we knew Africa's past better, we would be better prepared to use this communalism positively. The first question for the scholar employing this approach that we recommend is not to decide whether to reject or embrace communitarianism but rather to see whether we can get it straight. To corroborate this view, there have been debates on the idea of critical communitarian that makes provisions for the right of the individual in society. Such is the communitarian debate between Kwame Gyekwe on moderate communitarianism and Ifeanyi Menkiti. However, we should also be careful about the understanding of freedom, equality, and justice as it is pushed forward in specific communities. Our realities might be different so also our understanding of justice

and equality. Freedom in non-African societies might require that children determine the type of education they want to pursue – what to learn and what not to learn. Nevertheless, this is different in some African societies where the parent guides and monitors what the children learn until they get to an age of convenience. By convenience here, I mean when the parent is satisfied that the child can handle life issues. The question of human rights in a society is been determined by the history, the traditions, culture and the religion of the people. For instance, most African communal societies, at least in the traditional African are rooted in deep religiosity and this goes against the idea of universal human rights.

#### **D. Value Education as the Core of Yorùbá Communal Life**

The community becomes the first teacher of moral values as the child begins to learn directly through moral indoctrination and indirectly through watching the actions and the beliefs of the people. By community, we mean a sub-society whose members are;

Firstly, are in personal contact,

Secondly, they are concerned for one another's welfare.

Thirdly, are committed to common purposes and procedures,

Fourthly, share responsibility for joint actions, and

Lastly, value membership in the community as the goal worth pursuing (Kneller 1971:49). Insist on this same point, in his book *Politics*, Aristotle argued among other things that the ideal society is that which affords its citizens the opportunity for attaining happiness or what he described as 'the good life'. The 'good life', in this context is described as the 'complete and active realization of all man's capabilities of activities', that is, those activities which contribute to man's self-fulfilment. But Aristotle also held that proper education, both physical and moral, is needed to complete this realization and thereby the achievement of the life of well-being. Put differently, we may (following Aristotle), describe an ideal political society or state as "a consciously devised association of individuals for the achievement of deliberately defined aims" (Agulanna 2010, p.289). In the words of Eneh and Okolo (1998, p.49), the major reason for the existence of any community is the procurement of the good life for its members. In other words, part of the reason why community exists is for the provision of human social goods of the people living in such a community. Following this line of reasoning, the

community is nothing but a mere natural extension of the individual coming together to become one. In the words of Sunday Awoniyi (2015, p.6) quoting Ajayi and Ojo submits that “cultural education is such in which children and young individuals are educated according to the native custom, practices, beliefs and general life pattern of the society. Its main concerns are the character, morals, physical, and vocational development of the individual, as well as the inculcation in the children of the society right type of values as they learn to identify, understand and appreciate the cultures, norms, and values of the society.” This education cuts across the use of language, greetings and mode of dressing, conduct before elders and among peers, family lives, leadership responsibilities, and morals.

Communal values include the idea of brotherhood, togetherness, and joint action, hospitality to mention but a few. “African values are unwritten moral codes commonly identified by people living within the geographical sphere of the continent. They refer to moral principles, which guide the actions and belief systems of people living within and outside the territory but are of African descent. The value manifests over some time through shared experiences, environment and social interactions” (The Editor, 2015).

Cooperative mode of commerce is encouraged as the people engages in various means of assisting each other. It is usually referred to in the traditional Yorùbá society as an exchange of duties, where an individual helps the other in his farm, especially during planting and harvesting, and the same individual is also assisted too as reciprocity. This show that the cooperative service subscribes to by the people goes beyond money lending but the exchange of service. This is the core element of communalism. The quotation of Mulunga will do justice to our analysis so far. He argued that,

In the African community model, the household's labour and level of contribution were recognised in sharing benefits. Every member of the community is expected to contribute to society, according to their ability. For this reason, every member of society participated in the economy except for very young children and the very old. Everyone who could work worked, but those who could not work were taken care of. Parasitism, free riding, and exploitation did not exist or were greatly discouraged. To qualify for manhood or womanhood, one had to demonstrate the shared values of responsibility, ethical behaviour, and hard work. (Malunga 2014: 628).

The culture encourages dependency on one another, as no one is enough of his own. A Yorùbá proverb that rightly captures the above illustration is “*Ajeji owo kan ko gb’eru d’ori*” that is,

‘One hand cannot lift a heavy load to the head’. This proverb emphasises the importance of joint action, unity and cooperation among the people. Nevertheless, a dependency is good if it does not promote parasitism and laziness among the people. There is no reference to a superhero when it comes to the delivery of a task. However, the Yorùbá have certain heroes they acknowledge in the history of their civilisation, but these heroes are nothing without the joint involvement of the common people in the community. Therefore, both the adult, young, male and female are believed to be needful when it comes to contributing to community development. The proverb that readily captures this is ‘*omode gbon, agba gbon lafi da Ife*’ meaning the cooperation of both the young and old is what makes Ife a community. Ife here represents a community and not necessarily Ife the cradle of Yorùbá race and everyone in such community ensures the growth and development of themselves and others. Therefore, values are as important to the people as their personhood, as there are no personal, self-attained values. What we have are communal values. This does not mean that the Yorùbá community does not welcome innovative ideas that could be documented to guide the people. It must be such that will be accepted by the community. Hence, therefore the idea of personal testimony in Yorùbá epistemology is believed to be false. Knowledge belongs to the community. It is difficult for an individual to claim authority on certain knowledge because the knowledge, for the Yorùbá and most African culture, is shared or inherited.

Moreover, the idea of taking care of one another covers many aspects of the African cultural values. It is the principle of hospitality, parental responsibility and personal responsibility. The Yorùbá regards the care for the aged as part of the rites one must pay in life. Taking one’s aged parent to a caregiver is taboo. The Yorùbá proverbs say ‘*ti okete ba d’agba tan, omu omo re lo ma n mu*’ meaning ‘the big rat depends on its offspring for a living when it grows old.’ The point is to show that the labour of the parent to bring up their offspring is rewarded through an act of reciprocity when the parent grows old. Therefore, the Yorùbá emphasize the idea of training one’s children so that they can give back to the parent and the community at large. The purpose of the training is for empowerment and not for accumulation of facts that are sometimes unproductive. Philip Higgs (2008, p.455) points out that educational discourses of this kind- views knowledge and minds, not as commodities, nor as human resources to be developed and exploited, and then cast aside, but as treasures to be cultivated to improve the quality of life of both individuals and societies. In such an educational dispensation, the educational endeavour is directed, not at human resource development but rather, at the development of resourceful human beings in the service of their communities.



Another important aspect of hospitality is to care for people who do not have food to eat. Malanga (2014) says that “hospitality was also linked to generosity. I remember when I was growing up that whenever my mother cooked a chicken, which was considered a delicacy at that time, she would go around the compound giving the neighbours a piece of the chicken before we could eat ourselves.” (Ibid, 2014, p.629). Hospitality is a value to be cherished and nourished for even national development. Our level of hospitality shows our reception of strangers whenever we encountered one.

Values in Africa are an essential ingredient of collective social living. In the words of Awoniyi (2015, p.4), “values refer to the attitude, beliefs, behaviours and actions that are cherished and acceptable standards of behaviours which each society expects that the members should abide; although, it differs from one society to another. This is because social groups or human societies have various beliefs, attitudes and standards that form their value system.” African value is not just a set of attitudes, preference and behaviour, of Africans, but disposition and the mode of interpretation of social realities. I use my interpretation here to capture how most African communities’ frown at issues such as transgender, and other queer social phenomena. Their understanding of these issues is on their exposure to colonization and the Western religion. An individual that has this disposition is shunned in public and do not fit into the category of the African (Yorùbá) concept of a person. This is not to say that the orientation and belief systems are perfect, especially in the modern era where these beliefs are challenged. Cultural values negate the right of the individual in the community because of the value that traditional African societies place on communalism is expressed in the sharing of common social life, commitment to the social or common good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligations, caring for others, interdependence, and solidarity (Awoniyi 2015, p.8). At the same time, the claims of individuality are recognized (Ibid 2015, p.8). Traditional African societies, nevertheless, urges the avoidance of extreme individualism, which is seen as potentially destructive of human values and of the whole meaning and essence of human society. Attempts are therefore made to balance communalism and individualism so that they can co-exist (Geller and Glücklich 2012, p.45). Religious rules are assigned with consequences in place of taboo, which has been instituted before the advent of democracy or what we can call constitutional societies.

#### **4. A New Way of Thinking on Personhood in Yorùbá Thought System**

Since the earliest publication of the Yorùbá traditions carried out by classical scholars, Bolaji Idowu and Wande Abimbola were concerned with writing about the practices and beliefs of the Yorùbá people. Their works serve as a testament for discussion on the conception of human personality. Resulting from the amassed volume of works and writings is a vast contribution and discussion from scholars such as Moses Akin Makinde, Segun Gbadegesin, Olusegun Oladipo. There have been works and writings, dedicated to analysing who a person is in Africa traditional thought systems. It can be said that the number of philosophical theories of person is close, if not equal, to the number of societies or cultures in Africa. It is pertinent to note that the conception of a person was not only discussed among the Yorùbá, but also by other African scholars.

To speak about the normative aspect is to argue that being a person in the African world is beyond a descriptive reference to individual biological constituents. After reading Polycarp Ikuenobe's (2006) book, *The Idea of Personhood* in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we can argue that the normative account of a person is dependent on the metaphysical view. We cannot claim to be successful in the normative if the descriptive and metaphysical are not considered. The descriptive approach embodies analysis of an ontological account of a person, which seeks to answer interrelated questions about whether a person is necessarily material, immaterial or both. It is also concerned with the problem of the mind-body dichotomy and the relationship between them. Furthermore, one method adopted in this study is the linguistic analysis where we go through and look at the way in which linguists have defined eniyan terms. Hence, this is a type of philosophy of language where you look at the meaning of words in order to generate some findings about meaning within the Yorùbá culture.

This paper's discussion of personhood in the African (Yorùbá) thought system is not exhaustive. Attention has hitherto been paid to the immaterial (Destiny and Emi) and little or no attention has been given to the physical aspect of the human person. Obviously, many African scholars have discussed extensively the normative and metaphysical aspect of a person. They include discussion on emi (the soul), ori (the carrier of destiny), destiny, hard and soft determinism and so on. However, little or no work has been comprehensively done on the physical account of a person and what each part of the body represents beyond the physical?

This section intends to achieve an important aim. It is centred on ara (body) as it matters both physically and normatively. This is the new way of thinking about the Yorùbá conception

of a person. No scholar has discussed the normative function of ara (body), which I will develop below.

Ojiji (the human shadow) represents both the physical and the spiritual. It is a belief that the human shadow acts as the human conscience police officer attached to monitor our activities and report our character and behaviours. Any good deeds we do as humans follow us forever through posterity (The law of Karma is thought to have proven this). The question that comes to mind here would be: is it not the case that our shadow which, of course, is always present with us, is responsible for carrying the product of our good deeds and makes us attractive to rewards? Whatever rewards, whether good or bad one receives from his action or inaction, will be an act of destiny orchestrated by human deeds, not an affixed portion by Olódùmaré (God).

Ese (leg) literally aids movement and connately emphasises the judicious use to which the individual puts his locomotive freedom. This freedom is not blind to the predestined allotment designed for the individual who only must fulfil destiny by using his two feet to locomote himself into fortune or misfortune. The locomotive function of the legs carries more meaning than it appears physically. A person who is described as possessing *ese buruku* (bad leg) is a harbinger of misfortune for whoever harbours him or her. This construct is also used to describe the personality of an individual (Elegbeleye 2005, p.89). For example, *elese osi* (left leg) or *elese osi meji* (possessor of two left legs) or *elese buruku* (owner of a bad leg) are all connotative expressions depicting the construct of an unacceptable personality among the Yorùbá. In this case, the locomotive function of the leg centres as an existential idea, which is explained in two words as – *sun* (move) and *sún* (sleep). He who sleeps does not move, and he who moves does not sleep. Let us note that both paradoxes (*sun* and *sún*) require the use of the legs and help us understand human existence and the Yorùbá language. The Yorùbá see this part of life as very important. They help in the description of our life plans and make us value the human person more than a mere story of the bodily parts.

The normative representation of sleep and movement is important to the philosophy of the Yorùbá. He who refuses to move but sleeps has left his fate in the hands of poverty and penury. Hence, he makes life uncomfortable for himself, by eventually living a life dependent on others. The existence of such an individual is already threatened by wants and lacks. Ultimately, the meaning of life becomes obscure to such an individual and the call to suicide will be inevitable.

It is because most causes of death are a result of existential tragedies of the meaninglessness of life; the inability to comprehend the essence of living.

In contrast, the person who engages in existential movement sun (motion) oversees his destiny, by seeking material and non-material phenomena that will make life meaningful for him through moving from a place to another without being idle. Therefore, comfort will become the utmost goal of such a person. Here, we have, in other chapters, pointed out that the Yorùbá have laid down moral codes that are to be collectively subscribed to by members of the society. This is to guide whoever that is in pursuit of life comfort, to avoid an excessive and dubious accumulation of wealth. This is to enable the individual, to pursue a meaningful livelihood, not to distort the existence of others with his pursuit. Therefore, acts such as fraud, robbery, and selfish pursuit of desire are not allowed. This is because the Yorùbá believe that we exist in the comity of others, and we share a collective destiny as a people and have our fate and existence connected to others. In this case, the locomotive function of the leg carries more meaning than it appears physically. Therefore, in some cultural rites among the Yorùbá people, for instance, marital rites, the legs of the bride must be washed before entering the groom's house. It is believed that washing the bride's legs symbolises the removal of idleness (sun), bad luck or bad ori that might have been brought into her husband's house by her if she is an adherent of the Yorùbá faith. However, a symbol to show that beyond ori (inner head), the carrier of destiny; legs are responsible for ordering a man's path to success and the accomplishment of destiny.

However, for the Yorùbá, accomplishing one's destiny requires bravery (aya). The word aya descriptively means the human chest and normatively means bravery. If the Yorùbá says 'o ni aya', the literal meaning is, he has a chest, However, the point is not just that he has a chest but, more importantly, that he is brave. Furthermore, the importance of opolo (brain) cannot be ignored because a person can choose a good ori in heaven and yet fail on earth despite the use of his legs, if such use is not coordinated correctly by one's brain (opolo). Likewise, opolo (brain) is very crucial and probably more critical than ese. Moreover, the brain itself is not considered deformed merely because some other part of the body is deformed. Thus, it is assumed that a person who has a deformed body has an opportunity to explore his non-physical talents which are purely the offspring of his mental capacity rather than physical qualities. Ori (head), as we have discussed earlier comprises the physical and the metaphysical function as the carrier of human destiny. In the denotative sense, ori does not necessarily mean destiny but being a leader. The Yorùbá pray '*ki ori ma di eru*' meaning I will always be the head and not the tail. Besides and away from the metaphysical function of ori, the ori performs the function

of identity. For instance, let us imagine a body without a head; it signifies that it will be challenging to identify the body without the head. In this sense, the head performs one primary function which is Identity. As said earlier, the ori (head) is the carrier of destiny, and it means, necessarily by implication, that every individual has his ori (head) distinct and separable from another person's head, it also defines his choice of destiny as distinct although not separable, because destiny is connective and collective (Adésuyi 2019). Sometimes we share a destiny with other people; other times, we cause or assist others in actualising their destiny. An example of assisting or sharing of destiny is that of a teacher to his student.

Inu (ikun), for the Yorùbá, is known as the stomach and inside. The normative function is such that it serves as storage or that part of the body that manages or saves information. There is a proverb among the Yorùbá, '*Obẹ̀ kii mi ikun àgbà*', which literally means the soup does not move around in an elder's belly. This means one should be able to keep secrets. Unfortunately, the proverb tends to make us understand that only elders can keep secrets because, at that point in their life, they hardly get angry because most elders have experienced a lot in life. That is why the Yorùbá say '*ohun agba ri ti oju re jin, ti omode ba ri oju re a fo*' meaning what an elder has experienced if a child experiences it, s/he might go blind. Another saying goes '*opo alangba lo da iknu dele, a o mo eyi ti inu n run*', which means literally: all lizards lie flat on their stomach and it is difficult to determine which has a stomach-ache. The point is that everyone looks the same on the outside, but everyone has problems that are invisible to outsiders. Another proverb among the Yorùbá that supports the normative meaning of inu goes thus; '*onikun lo mo'ka*.'

The thesis adopts the method of philosophical argumentation, conceptual clarification, and critical analysis. However, this section has provided a new way of thinking with an objective being to assist, inform, and contribute to developing knowledge in philosophy. The African (Yorùbá) scholars have limited their discussion of person to the tripartite approach. Having chosen some vital part of the body, and discussed their importance in the social context, then, readers and scholars would have been more equipped with discussion apart from the focus on destiny and emi.

## 5. Conclusion

We have, in this study, examined the concept of person in traditional African (Yorùbá) context. Within the gamut of Yorùbá philosophical thought, a person is conceived as a moral person whose life and existence are substantially dependent on others. Therefore, what we have shown in this paper is that there is more to the Yorùbá conception of a person beyond the metaphysical and normative interpretation. Hence, the new position established in this paper is quite resonantly different and offers a better explanation when compared with other accounts of earlier scholars on the human person. Irrefutably, we cannot say that the conditions of being qualified as an eniyan (person) together with the idea of communitarian both present what we call a human person in the Yorùbá worldview. Even though, an individual is independent in nature, the community is the basis for the actualisation of an individual values, and personality. Thus, as the community partly determines personhood in traditional Yorùbá and African culture generally, so does the parts of the body continually mould and nurture personhood in human personality, in the cultural background of the Yorùbá people.

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